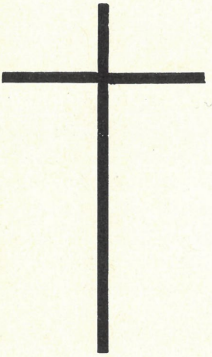
The Christian Layman's Total Commitment to CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



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Introduction:

"The Miracle of America" is the title of a new book recently written by Dr. George L. Ford of the Free Methodist Church. An advertisement states that the book calls for a "complete commitment to the cause of Christ."

In a newspaper account of an address given by C. J. Dyck of Mennonite Biblical Seminary, he states "The real nature of the priesthood (of all believers) is sacrifice."

Harold Lundquist says: "There is just no use talking about loyalty unless we are ready to render full obedience. When Jesus said: 'follow me' Matthew (who was also known as Levi), arose and followed him."

Vernon Mortenson, General Director of The Evangelical Alliance Mission, wrote: "Sacrifice! Yes, we say sacrifice is necessary if the gospel is to be spread, even as it was needful for Christ to give His life for our redemption. But is it an expression only, or is it real in experience?"

The topic assigned to me uses the word "layman" and I will try to treat the subject from this perspective. But, recently I came across notes I used in speaking to ministers and ministerial students on the subject "Committed in the Ministry." My first point was that "it means everything it means for every other Christian." Thus, that which I say this evening is applicable to everyone.

The topic will be treated in three stages:

DIMENSION—of the commitment
DIRECTION—of the commitment
DEDICATION—of the commitment

The key thought of this presentation is that there is a way out of our present North American materialistic dilemma.

I

DIMENSION

Many attempts have been made to describe our present world. Possibly we spend too much time with the big problems.

We will treat this section of the talk briefly.

A. KEYWORDS OF OUR TIMES

1. RACE. The Civil War was over 99 years ago, but it was not until this year that determined efforts are being made for freedom.

A recent news release revealed that unless positive action is achieved, hundreds of thousands of Negroes are ready to lie prostrate on air field runways, railroad tracks and highways.

Even though they receive threatening letters continually, leaders continue to lead in the struggle.

In our world there are 930 million yellow people, 930 million white, 900 million brown-red and 240 million black.

2. SPACE. The Russian space feat indicates how fast we may expect progress in the future in the relentless effort to conquer space.

3. POPULATION. President Eisenhower appointed a Commission on National Goals. One of the questions treated was population. It was stated that it took until 1650 for the population of the world to reach one half billion. But by 1850 there the number of people doubled and by 1930 it doubled again. The next doubling will take place by 1980 and it is estimated that 35 years after that there will be another doubling.

These facts have widespread implications. It indicates something of the vastness of our task. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

4. LITERACY. The UN has stated that illiteracy must be reduced by 50 percent in ten years. For all practical purposes we might state that in about 15 to 20 years the world will be literate. Thus, the whole world of ideas will open before people.

5. HUNGER. The current issue of *Newsweek* (June 17, 1963) has a special feature on "hunger."

Paul G. Hoffman has said: "When historians write a history of the 20th century they won't have difficulty to select the most significant event . . . Not World War

I or II . . . The revolt of hundreds of millions of people against the continued acceptance of poverty, sickness and illiteracy as their normal life."

6. CONFUSION. One writer has thus described our world "Tension, confusion, hunger, racial strife, overturned governments, threats of war, world suffering. . . ."

7. INDEPENDENCE. Over 40 nations since the close of World War II. The experts had expected we would be only half as far as we are now.

8. TECHNOLOGY-AUTOMATION. Changing our way of life.

9. MEDICAL SCIENCE. Making great strides.

10. PROBLEMS. But this is not the only time we faced problems. A news item from October, 1857 indicates "it is a solemn moment and—of our trouble no man can see the end."

B. THE CHARATER OF THE DIMENSION. Trouble has always been the lot of the human race. We might say our times involve a new dimension in

1. *Extent.* Intense problems face people everywhere.

2. *Degree.* The depth of our problems is intense.

3. *Persistense.* Our times can be characterized by the expression "all outness." Whether we think of war preparation, technology, space exploration, sports, transportation, etc., persistence is a key word.

C. SPIRITUAL DIMENSION. God's dimension is greater than any created by man.

God created a world. What a great event that was!

His plan of salvation through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ embraces provision for all who will believe.

God's plans for the future have great

dimensions. We think of the Second Coming. "In the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) Jesus came the first time and He says 'I will come again." There is no question who will win the war between sin and righteousness: victory is ahead.

But our Lord's big plans involve us too. One of the surest teachings of the Bible is that it is His will that all shall have the privilege of hearing the gospel. "Go ye into all the world" and "every creature" involve bit plans for the spread of the gospel.

II

DIRECTION

There are so many problems. They are so intense. The outcome seems hopeless. Many people become frustrated and feel their small contributions cannot be significant.

There is a strong tendency to spend great amounts of time in discussing total problems. We get lost in the immensities.

There *is* a basic three-fold direction to which we may direct our attention. These three areas of witness and action form the framework for other needs.

The three areas are:

FOOD and the alleviation of suffering

LITERATURE for the liberated minds of the world

FULFILLING THE SOUL NEEDS through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us look at these three areas of opportunity:

A. FOOD AND THE ALLEVIATION OF SUFFERING

Newsweek reports that every day 10,000 people starve.

More than half the world's people are suffering from perpetual hunger.

The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

What are we going to do about it?

Dr. Arnold Toynbee says "The earth's hungry could be fed."

We need a spirit of compassion. Action begins with attitude. As long as starvation is confined to statistics we will not seek to do much.

Some feel the government ought to give the food to other countries. They have found ways to share much. But they give the opportunity for private organizations to get the food free. It costs $1.00 to get 300 pounds of food in starving stomachs. If the government would try to do it, perhaps only one-fourth as much could be done and it would be neutral instead of "in the Name of Christ."

Through our organized efforts in our Board of Christian Service (through MCC) and the Board of Missions we do have organized channels to feed the hungry and to alleviate suffering.

LUTI was mistaken for an old lady although she was only 16. She had crippled hands and feet, a swollen face, lumps on her face and distorted features. She was cured. She said "Oh doctor, I do have a new face, and it is truly a miracle. But I also have something more—a new heart —and that is the miracle of Jesus Christ."

Suffering people can be helped!

We can join larger movements. We can speak up for mercy instead of profit. It will be very costly to share. Dr. Toynbee says it will be very costly. Are we willing to speak up and pay the price?

We must realize the divine imperative. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17)

B. MIND. (Literature)

Amazing things are taking place. The UN declares that illiteracy must be cut in half in only ten years. India's literacy is now 23.7 percent and is increasing rapidly. But, it is said that 70 percent of the literature in India is communist and 85 percent of that which comes from the U.S. is not fit to read.

One country increased literacy from five percent to 60 percent in a few years.

What can we do? We can realize that we—yes, we of our generation—have the golden opportunity of the centuries. We can share the gospel through the printed page.

Opportunities abound. Just this week we heard of Levi Keidel's trip in the Congo during which time he sold 23,000 pieces of Christian literature. Supply is not keeping up with demand.

What can we do? We can't solve the whole problem. But we are sending Henry Dirks, a printer, to Congo as soon as he can get his passport and get ready.

In India we have three Christian reading rooms (out of only 50 in all India.)

With accelerated population and increases in literacy (at least 50,000,000 new readers a year) we need greatly increased efforts in regard to Christian literature.

C. FULFILLING THE SOUL NEEDS

Perhaps the most startling fact of our times is that there are still multitudes who have not heard the gospel.

As never before the spread of the gospel is dependent on the church of Jesus Christ.

Who will tell the world of Jesus?

> The Communists won't
> The Governments can't
> Only those who have the gospel can share it.

The time is ripe for the greatest missionary crusade of the centuries. The Lord has blessed us with young people. He has created a receptivity among the people of the world as never before. He has showered material blessings on us.

But to accomplish the task will be costly. In preparation for a message I read of the great story of missions through the years. John G. Patton was a great missionary hero. But, he went to the church yard to bury his baby. Later he went again to bury his beloved wife. Yet he carried on.

This leads us to the third word:

III

DEDICATION

Some years ago I was riding through the hills of North Carolina with a well-known Christian leader. He remarked that it must be disturbing to believe something which so few believe (referring to Biblical nonresistance.) I replied that it was disturbing but if the Bible teaches it one has no choice.

Thus to believe in and practice biblical dedication in prosperous North America immediately places one in a small minority—but the rewards are great.

A. QUESTIONS WE MUST FACE. There are four questions we need to face:

1. Does the Bible teach that people who were living at the time the Bible was written were to live lives of dedication, sacrifice and crossbearing?

In 1950, 142 people in the congregation of which I was pastor read through the entire Bible in a methodical way. Certainly in reading the Bible one gets the impression that people were to live the dedicated life:

a. The WORDS of the Bible indicate this: Matthew 16:24.

b. The CONTEXT of the passages support it. Witness the Good Samaritan. He was not only expected to express concern in words, but also action. The story of Stephen illustrates this. (Twice in recent trips I read through the entire Book of Acts. As one reads this book one gets the overwhelming impression that followers of Jesus were expected to live lives of dedication, sacrifice and cross-bearing.

c. The followers of Jesus interpreted the Bible as meaning that it meant them. They felt they were to apply the gospel.

2. Are the teachings relative to dedication, sacrifice and cross-bearing for that

generation only, or were they intended for succeeding generations?

The answer seems clear:

a. The context relative to these passages should be interpreted the same as others.

"There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," (Acts 4:12) is meant for every generation.

The trilogy (Romans 3:23; John 3:16; Matt. (16:24) are applicable. Ephesians 2:8-10 is for later generations.

b. Through the centuries men of God have interpreted biblical passages relative to dedication, sacrifice and cross-bearing as being applicable.

3. Are the teachings for today?

It would seem they are.

4. ARE THE TEACHINGS REGARDING DEDICATION, SACRIFICE AND CROSS-BEARING FOR PROSPEROUS PEOPLE LIVING TODAY OR ONLY FOR THOSE WHO ARE POOR AND ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SACRIFICE?

This is the most crucial question facing Christians in the North American context. Is the popular idea that we should be able to live in ease and still be dedicated Christians really biblical?

a. Choice is integral in the Bible. Regarding the cross Jesus said: "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." (Jn. 1:18)

Joshua said: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

An action to be sacrifice must involve choice.

b. The Bible seems to single out those who are prosperous—and that includes almost all of us. (Think of it: in some parts of the world the per capita income is only $70 a year and in U.S. it is $2,700.) The Old Testament sounds out warnings (Deut. 8:13-14, 18, Isa.

5:8; Eze. 33:31-33; Haggai 1:6.) The New Testament is full of teachings along this line: (Luke 6:38; Luke 12:15; 2 Cor. 8-9.)

c. The words of Jesus seem clear.

"Ye *cannot* serve God and mammon."

"If *any man* will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

"It *is* more blessed to give than to receieve."

Modern Christians in the North must have been mistaken. Yet—down through the centuries no one has found a way to go to the abundant life" of John 10:10 except through the "any man" of Matthew 16:24.

All rules of biblical interpretation lead us to the conclusion that Christians in prosperous circumstances are also to follow the way of dedication, sacrifice and cross bearing.

B. THE DIRECTION IS PERSONAL PARTICIPATION

1. The question is not the total—but the total God wants me to do.

A poem which has meaning expresses this thought:

I am only one But I am one.
I cannot do everything
But I can do something.
What I can do I ought to do
And what I ought to do
By the grace of God I will do.

The question we need to ask is "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

2. The question is not "What are others doing?" When a man asked Jesus this question He answered: "What is that to thee, follow thou me."

3. We need to begin where we are individually and as families. The glorious fact of our time is that we have more liberty to serve largely than ever before.

   We have more time saving devises.

   We have a much greater margin between what we need to live well and what we receive.

4. We need to apply the principles in a practical way. This is the crucial issue.

Sometimes I imagine 100 people drowning. There are 25 on the shore who can help. Some of the first ten say it isn't their fault the people are drowning and dismiss their responsibility. Others feel that to help would deprive them of something they wanted to do. Some felt they ought to do something so pulled one or two out.

The second ten figured out that if each would save four (4) all would be saved. So dutifully they went to work. Some pulled out three and some five, but they averaged four. After one man had pulled out his four, one of the drowning victims reached up his hands and called for help. The man on the shoreline stated that he had done his share and that if others had not gone home he would not be drowning. So with that the man went home and the one in the water drowned.

The final five decided to do all they could to save as many as possible. They kept at it until all were saved or beyond help.

We need to apply the principles of dedication, sacrifice, and cross bearing to our lives right where we live. Is there a cross for us? Indeed there is. For many the most difficult cross is to choose to follow Christ instead of the worldly motivation experts.

We need to apply the principles to our influence, time, talents and material resources.

We need to prayerfully consider the ten ways we dispose of our money: Food, clothing, housing, transportation (car), health care, culture and leisure time, personal care, taxes, saving and giving.

Depending on income families spend from 20 percent to 30 percent of their incomes on food. But my wife and I, as many others, have found that in all the places we have lived we could live very comfortably on about one half that amount. Thus, the average family simply by eating for health and well being (it can taste just as good) can actually give $500 or $600 *more* to the work of the Lord! If we *really* want to see starving people fed, literate people have something good to read and all people the opportunity of the gospel, why wouldn't we seek to do this? The same principle applies to other areas in the use of money.

The thrilling fact of our times is that it is possible to participate so largely in the Lord's work and yet live very satisfactory lives.

It needs to be remembered that the main thrust of this message is that the place to begin is the context of our present lives. (Many may feel they ought to go much further). Thus, Family A lives according to the commonly accepted patterns of the community and gives very moderately to the work of the Lord. Family B over a period of 15 years has $7,500 extra. They might give $4,000 of this (over and above regular giving) and actually save more and prepare for school for children and old age in a more satisfactory way than Family A.

C. THE KEY IS ACTS 10:38

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Is it? Jesus says so!

All of us are products of our own times. We are tempted to believe that if we really live in dedication we will lose out on the good things of life. We really want our cake and we want to eat it too!

But, like the Psalmist, we are often jealous in the wrong way.

Recently I observed a family of four on the train. (There are four in my family). The man and wife were drinking and smoking. If they come up to the average they likely spend $500 for these purposes in a year's time. They gave every appearance of being an average American family. They are running the risk of lung cancer and of becoming alcoholics. IS THIS FAMILY *REALLY* HAPPIER THAN A FAMILY WHICH DOES NOT SMOKE AND DRINK AND GIVES THIS MONEY TO FEED THE HUNGRY AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL?

Was Jesus really right? Is it more blessed to give than to receive? Yes, He was right! If we can really become convinced of this fact we are on the way of solving most of our practical problems.

1. IT IS THE NORMAL WAY. Sadie T. Crawley has written a book entitled "World Awareness." She points out that a baby makes a great discovery when he discovers his own toes. Very skilfully she points out the expanding awareness until it embraces the world.

   Someone has said you can measure a man by what makes him cry and laugh.

   It is normal to want to see hungry people fed and those without Jesus have the chance to hear about Him. To be self-satisfied is not normal.

   Shall I thank God
   for bread
   And for the safety
   Of the place I lay my head?
   In din of crashing worlds
   Shot through with screams of
   pain,
   I will do better, far,
   To thank my God
   That I am strong enough
   To share my bread,
   Alert enough to tell
   Those blinded by their woe
   That I still see a star!
   When hungry children

Shake with fright,
What can it mean to God
That I am safe at night?
(Franklin Elmer, Jr.)

2. IT IS THE WAY OF GREATER BLESSING.

The individual and family which feels they must follow the Joneses are losing so much. Jesus simply was right: "It *is* more blessed (happy) to give than to receive."

Even many Christain families have been so desirous to possess for themselves and their children that which money can buy that they have failed to receive that which no amount of money can buy.

It has been well said that more a person has to live for the less he needs to live on.

Jesus says our blessings shall be good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over."

Jesus issues the warning: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

We will never really experience the gospel until we are willing to adjust our living for the sake of the gospel.

Even people without distinctly Christian motivation have found that joy comes through seeing others helped. TIME magazine had a feature about a man who suddenly decided to "give himself away." He experienced a new dimension in life.

Yes, the thought of people who are actually living today because of the money we gave to buy food and souls saved because of the money we gave and families with the joy of Christ far, far outweigh the extra food we might eat

to our own detriment, the bigger and newer car we are doing without, the more extravagant clothing we are leaving alone. . . .

Yes, "it *is* more blessed to give than to receive." But this is the most difficult verse for North American Christians to believe!

As most of you know I did not get married as young as some others. Friends frequently used to tell me that I had much to learn. I did. One of the most vivid things I learned about children is that the road to maturity is a difficult one. It is very hard for children to learn that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." It is very hard for them to experience a real spirit of gratitude. This is maturity of the highest order. We need to be patient to allow children to grow in this grace.

D. BUSINESS ASPECTS OF DEDICATION

This has been such a strong concern on the part of some people that I have devoted major portions of some talks to this aspect of dedication. Some have felt that if Christians are truly dedicated to the Lord, it would destroy the prosperity of the community. Of course, this is not the primary consideration in dedication, but our conviction is that dedication is sound from every point of view.

Giving is investment! Investment of the highest order! To send a missionary family to our furthest fields costs about $2,500 (for a good sized family). People give this money. It speeds the messengers of our Lord Jesus Christ along the way to share the gospel! But economically the transportation industry and all who work in it —is benefited. It effects everything employees buy. The money goes to work in as real a way as if it were spent for something else.

We might give for a building project:

church building, school, etc. This money is used for bricks, cement, earth moving machinery, wood working, plumbing, paint, etc.

To spend *much less* on ourselves and to give *much more* for the work of the Lord is good gospel and good economies!

And—what about our relations with other countries. One U.S. Senator has said that had it not been for the work of Christian missionaries around the world many areas would be in chaos. To spread the gospel of Jesus Christ makes sense in every way.

E. WHAT WOULD IT MEAN IF WE WERE REALLY DEDICATED TO THE WORK OF THE LORD?

Only God knows: but it is far beyond what we can possibly imagine. Ephesians 3:20 is gloriously applicable.

1. We can compare with what those dedicated to other ways of life are doing. About twenty years ago (20) I was startled to discover what those who were dedicated to smoking, drinking and gambling were willing to spend for their way of life.

   Can we really say we ought to do less? This is a startling question and a heart searching one.

2. We can compare with what some others are giving.

   At 2:30 one morning this year I got on the train. Later in the morning I fell into conversation with a minister of a well known denomination preaching in a below average income area. During our conversation he told me that his congregation was giving at the per capita rate of $300. I asked if they were in a building program or paying a debt. He said they were not. Furthermore he said he didn't know any families which were really sacrificing.

Think of it: here is a congregation in a lower income area, not in a building program, giving at the rate of $300 a member. They made no claims of special light on discipleship. They did not say they do not believe in war, but believe rather in healing. Do our claims sometimes merely consist of words? Our Conference is giving at the rate of about $110 a member. We could be giving $300 a member and basically we would be better off and we would experience a dimension of spiritual blessing we cannot imagine.

3. The glorious fact of our times. We are living in a time of restlessness. Modern man feels he needs all kinds of things to attain happiness. Thus, there has never been a time when the difference between that which we need for good living and that which we get is to great. Actually in North America our incomes have been increasing so much faster than our cost of living.

   It is now possible for those in average circumstances to give at the rate of $100 a month to the Lord's work. We can feed people. We can give to publication and education. We can share our Lord Jesus Christ. If we truly love the Lord and if we can do this, what excuse can we give to the Lord for not doing it?

CONCLUSION

I would like to make three points in concluding this message:

A. HOW WILL WE DECIDE OUR SERVICE FOR THE LORD? Time does not permit going into many details. But *the key is love.*

States do have laws regarding the care of children. But I am amazed at how far

parents can go in neglecting children before the law steps in. We do not raise our children by making sure we obey the law or do the average.

Love goes beyond law. Love is the key in our dedication. The love of God in sending His son. (John 3:16) The love of Christ for us. (Rom. 5:8) Our love for the Lord. Our love for others. This love will not ask "when have I fulfilled my legal requirement" or "when have I done the average," but rather "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

B. WE MUST EXPERIENCE THE BLESSINGS OF DEDICATION BY FAITH. We become Christians by faith and we experience the deeper walk by faith. This is the difficult part. We must follow dedication in faith. An illustration which has meant much to me is an imaginative conversation with a chick about to be hatched. The person on the outside tries to explain that on the outside the chick will have more air and freedom. But the chick says he is doing fine. He has always been in the egg and he is having a good time. Then, the chick breaks the egg and comes to the outside. Only then does the chick know what is meant by "more air and freedom." So, the Christian must break the shell of life controlled by the mores and customs of a compromising society in order to *really* know what sacrificial dedication means.

C. WE NEED THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS IS THE MASTER KEY. How could John Patton bury his baby and his wife and yet keep on? It was not done in his own strength: it was the power of the Holy Spirit within him.

How can a man, just a bit above average in income, give $100 a month to one phase of the outreach of the church (giving liberally to other phases too) when many around him live compromising lives? It is by the power of the Holy Spirit!

We achieve dedication not so much by trying or determination, but rather by sub-

mission to the power of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we will not need practical wisdom, but it does mean that the willingness comes by the power of the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor. 5:14; 2 Cor. 4:7) And, He guides us in practical wisdom too!

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things,
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
to serve the King of Kings.

Lift high the Cross of Christ!
Tread where His feet have trod;
As brothers of the Son of man
Rise up, O men of God!

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(Note: These are expanded notes prepared at the request of the Northern District Men's Organization.)